

MEMS Graduate Seminar - French 830

Writing the Mediterranean

Cross-cultural Perspectives on the Early Modern World

Mondays 4:00-6:30pm

Prof. Ellen Welch

This course will explore early modern literary and documentary representations of the Mediterranean. A space of travel, commerce, piracy, captivity, conversions (both voluntary and forced), and linguistic invention, the early modern Mediterranean presents itself as a unique object for the study of inter-cultural relations beyond simple formulations of “East-meets-West.” Topics of discussion will include the negotiation of European identities in relation to North Africa (and vice versa); literary treatments of the instability of cultural signifiers and the fluidity of identity; the relationships between literature and history, fiction and imperialistic discourses; the politics of aesthetic delight in depictions of the “other”; the role of genre in creating, reinforcing, or subverting commonplaces and stereotypes; the place of gender in representations of cultural difference; questions of religious identity and discourses on conversion; and the role of language and translation in negotiating and forging new identities. We will approach readings of literary texts from a variety of critical perspectives, including historicist and post-colonial approaches, examining and debating the relative value of these different critical lenses. We will also discuss the merits and problems of formulating “the Mediterranean” as a field of study.

Works to be studied include texts by Corneille, Molière, Lafayette, Racine, Voltaire, Virgil, Shakespeare, Massinger, Cervantes, and Boccaccio, as well as a range of travel narratives and documentary texts by European and North African writers.

This interdisciplinary course is sponsored by UNC’s Medieval and Early Modern Studies program. Graduate students from all departments and programs are welcome. Course discussions will be in English and all readings are available both in their original languages and in English translation.

Email the instructor with any questions: erwelch@email.unc.edu.

